

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 0985

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, XO, CE

SUBJ: FOREIGN MINISTRY REMARKS ON DEMILITARIZATION OF
INDIAN OCEAN

REF: A. COLOMBO 0965 (NOTAL); B. COLOMBO 0884

1. DEPUTY MINISTER FOR DEFENSE AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS LAKSHMAN JAYAKODY IN PRESS CONFERENCE MARCH 18 WAS ASKED BY RESIDENT INDIAN PRESS AGENCY SAMACHER CORRESPONDENT TO COMMENT ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S MARCH 9 PRESS CONFERENCE REMARK THAT WE HAVE PROPOSED TO THE SOVIETS THAT THE INDIAN OCEAN BE COMPLETELY DEMILITARIZED. (REFTEL A, A USIA MSG REPEATED TO STATE).

2. ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PRESS, JAYAKODY REPLIED THAT SRI LANKA WAS "OVERJOYED". HE ADDED: "AT LAST THE TWO MAJOR POWERS ARE FALLING IN LINE AND THINKING QUITE SERIOUSLY OF WHAT OUR PRIME MINISTER PROPOSED ON THE INDIAN OCEAN PEACE ZONE MATTER." HE ADDED THAT MR. CARTER'S REACTION TO THE DIALOGUE THAT HAD BEEN INITIATED ON THE IOPZ PROPOSAL WAS EXTREMELY GOOD AND POPULAR. IT APPEARED HE HAD A POPULAR PROGRAM AND WANTS TO WITHDRAW THE NAVAL PRESENCE FROM THE ZONE AND SUBSEQUENTLY
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RUN DOWN THE US STAGING POST AT DIEGO GARCIA. ADDITIONALLY HE HAD THE PROVISIO THAT ALL NAVAL POWERS IN THE REGION SHOULD BE MOVED OUT. THE PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL WAS VERY FEASIBLE AND APPROPRIATE AND IS INDICATIVE THAT WHAT MRS.BANDARANAIKE HAD PROPOSED WAS SOMETHING TANGIBLE AND NOT A PIPE DREAM AS LOCAL POLITICIANS HAD DESCRIBED IT AT DIFFERENT STAGES. DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE LIKEY TO FOLLOW, HE SAID, WAS A CHANGE IN THE

AUSTRALIAN VIEWPOINT AND A MORE RATIONAL AND SERIOUS ATTITUDE FROM THE LITTORAL AND HINTERLAND STATES OF THE INDIAN OCEAN IN THE FUTURE.

3. JAYAKODY SAID THAT HIS IMPROMPTU REMARKS WERE BASED ENTIRELY ON PRESS REPORTS OF THE PRESIDENT'S REMARKS. OBVIOUSLY, THE REFERENCE TO THE RUNDOWN OF DIEGO GARCIA WAS IN THE NATURE OF SOMEONE'S EMBROIDERY ON THE ORIGINAL PRESS CONFERENCE TEXT. WE ARE, OF COURSE, UNAWARE OF WHAT THE SRI LANKAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON MAY HAVE COMMENTED ON THE SUBJECT.

4. WE NOW NOTE THE PRESIDENT'S REFERENCE IN HIS MARCH 17 UN SPEECH TO AN EFFORT TO ESTABLISH SOVIET WILLINGNESS TO REACH AGREEMENT WITH US ON MUTUAL MILITARY RESTRAINT IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. UNLESS THE MDFA INITIATES FURTHER DISCUSSION WITH US ON OUR VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF OUR MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, EMBASSY BELIEVES IT MIGHT BE PREFERABLE TO LET MATTER DROP FOR NOW, RATHER THAN FOR US TO TAKE AN EARLY INITIATIVE IN TONING DOWN THE EXUBERANCE OF JAYAKODY'S RESPONSE. HOWEVER, SHOULD OPPORTUNITY ARISE INFORMALLY, WE WILL MAKE THE POINT TO MDFA OFFICIALS IN LOW KEY MANNER THAT THE PRESIDENT IS SPEAKING IN TERMS OF PROPOSALS TO THE SOVIETS, AND THAT NO REFERENCE TO THE FUTURE OF DIEGO GARCIA HAS BEEN MADE BY HIM IN ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT OF WHICH WE ARE AWARE. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO TAKE A SIMILAR LINE WITH AMBASSADOR KANAKARATNE.
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Sent Date: 18-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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